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**VETERANS IN RURAL AMERICA**  
**APRIL 9<sup>TH</sup> 2014**  
**WASHINGTON, DC**

**Honorable Senators, Representatives and distinguish guest for the record my name is Richard Marcellais, North Dakota State Senator since 2006; served on Government & Veterans Affairs & Education Committees; 27 years of Federal Government Service experience with the Veterans Administration, Bureau of Indian Affairs, Indian Health Service, I am a Vietnam Veteran from 1968-1971; I am Native American member of the Turtle Mountain Band of Chippewa in Belcourt, North Dakota; Married 45 years to Betty with two sons and eight grandchildren.**

**Rolette County District 9 Veterans Population is over 900 80% Native American; Challenges posed by the severe poverty of many Native American Veterans, economic hardships and out-migration affecting our local community.**

**Priorities include housing, health care and job creation business loans, veteran assistance, create a small business incubator, agricultural business technical assistance, increase small retail business and implement an updated countywide tourism plan.**

**Plans to develop information and other infrastructure, land-use planning and a zoning code, address housing needs coordination and enhance programs, services for veterans with special needs and research, develop veteran job requirements in the area.**

## **ISSUES & CONCERNS**

### **EMPLOYMENT**

- ***High unemployment 30 %***
- ***High Poverty 52%***
- ***No Jobs***
- ***Lack of education on small business administration opportunities***
- ***Need training on vocational rehabilitation & employment programs***
- ***Funding for Native American employment & training programs***

### **HOUSING**

- ***Limited due to high unemployment & high poverty***
- ***Limited funding resources***
- ***Need education on housing opportunities***
- ***HUD-VA Supportive Housing Program needed***
- ***Lack of knowledge homeless veterans resources***
- ***USDA housing opportunities needed***

### **Health**

- ***Need VA's Health Care for Homeless Veterans Program***
- ***Transportation to Fargo VA Health Care System***
- ***Limited resources available for PTSD & CD***
- ***Need an Office of Rural Health***

**SERVING VETERANS IN RURAL AMERICA**  
**Trip Report**

**Name of Traveler: Richard Marcellais, District #9 North Dakota State Senator**

**Destination of Travel: Washington, DC**

**Date (s) of Travel: April 8-10, 2014**

**Purpose of Travel: Attend Serving Veterans in Rural America: A Symposium**

**April 9, 2014:**

***Introductions by Mr. Moises Loza, Executive Director, Housing Assistance Council (HAC) Currently the Executive Director of the Housing Assistance Council, Moises Loza has extensive experience at the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development and the USDA Rural Housing Service. Active in rural programs for many years, he is currently the Chairman of the National Hispanic Housing Council and Chairman of the Rural Development Leadership Network. He also serves as Treasurer of the National Low Income Housing Coalition, is on the board of directors of the National Community Reinvestment Coalition and serves on advisory committees for Bank of America and Morgan Stanley. A member of a migrant farmworker family, Loza grew up in south Texas and traveled extensively with his family seeking farmwork in the South, Midwest, and West.***

***Ms. Heather Pritchard, Manager, National Partnerships and Atlanta Hometown Giving, The Home Depot Foundation***

***Since 2002, The Home Depot Foundation has invested more than \$300 million in local communities to build and renovate homes for deserving families; transform local parks and playgrounds; and repair community facilities.***

***In 2011, The Home Depot Foundation focused its financial and volunteer resources to help nonprofit organizations dedicated to improving the homes of economically disadvantaged U.S. military veterans. To date the Foundation has committed \$80 million and the volunteer skills of thousands of Home Depot associates to these efforts. From building wheelchair ramps, to renovating homes of wounded warriors, to remodeling transitional housing for homeless veterans, we are doing this to show our appreciation for the sacrifices they have made for all of us.***

***According to recent statistics, military veterans disproportionately live in rural communities. We know that to have an impact on individual families as well as on communities in rural areas, cross sector collaboration is essential. To make headway on the complicated housing issues that face veterans, we all must continue to work together and leverage our resources to improve the future of our communities.***

***We're extremely excited to do just that through our partnership with the Housing Assistance Council (HAC). Through HAC's new Affordable Housing for Rural Veterans Initiative and the development of a rural veterans revolving loan and grant***

*fund, we not only hope to be able to help meet the immediate critical housing needs of veterans in rural areas., but provide training and technical resources to nonprofits that make a positive impact of these individuals, families and communities for years to come.*

**Congressional Perspectives:**

***U.S. Representative Tammy Duckworth (D-III)***

*Congresswoman Tammy Duckworth is an Iraq War Veteran and former Assistant Secretary of Veterans Affairs. In 2004 Duckworth was deployed to Iraq as a Blackhawk helicopter pilot for the Illinois Army National Guard. She was one of the first Army women to fly combat missions during Operation Iraqi Freedom until her helicopter was hit by an RPG on November 12, 2004. Duckworth lost her legs and partial use of her right arm in the explosion and was awarded a Purple Heart for her combat injuries.*

*In 2009, President Obama appointed Duckworth to be Assistant Secretary of Veterans Affairs. At VA, Duckworth led an initiative to end homelessness among Veterans. She created the Office of Online Communications to improve the VA's accessibility, especially among young Veterans, and also worked to address the unique challenges that Native American and female Veterans face. Duckworth ran for Congress in 2012 to advocate for the practical solutions and cooperation needed to rebuild our economy and ensure that every American has a chance to achieve the American Dream.*

*Duckworth lives in Hoffman Estates with her husband Bryan, an Army Major. Since her recovery, Duckworth has taken up scuba diving, surfing, skydiving and flies as a civilian pilot. Fulfilling a promise she made at Walter Reed, she has also completed several marathons. She has resumed her Ph.D. studies at Northern Illinois University and is also working toward a Ph.D. in Health and Human Services at Capella University. In her spare time, she volunteers at local food pantries and enjoys couponing and flea markets. Duckworth declined a military medical retirement and continues to drill as a Lieutenant Colonel in the Illinois Army National Guard.*

***U.S. Senator Johnny Isakson (R-GA)***  
***U.S. Senator Bernie Sanders (I-VT)***

**Housing Our Heroes: Research on Rural Veterans**

***Mr. Lance George, Director of Research and Information, Housing Assistance Council Prior to becoming HAC's Research Director, Lance George served as the organization's Senior Research Associate for 10 years. Before HAC, he worked for Frontier Housing, Inc., a nonprofit organization that builds affordable homes for low-income families in Appalachian Eastern Kentucky. George research and policy analysis at HAC encompasses a wide array of issues and topics related to rural housing including manufactured housing, poverty and high need rural areas, rural definitions***

*and classifications, mortgage access and finance, and general demography, mapping, and data analysis of rural people and their housing conditions.*

*Mr. Eric Oberdorfer, Research Associate, Housing Assistance Council*  
*As a Research Associate at the Housing Assistance Council, Eric Oberdorfer has worked on a variety of projects and reports that focused on topics ranging from farmworker housing to homelessness on Native American lands and most recently housing for rural seniors. His previous experience includes working with affordable housing at the Department of Neighborhoods in Anchorage, Alaska as the City of Vancouver and BC Housing in Vancouver, British Columbia. After graduating with a Bachelor's degree from the University of Washington in Geography and International Development, he spent a year teaching English in Thailand and then moved to Alaska as an AmeriCorps Volunteer. He subsequently received his Master's degree in Community and Regional Planning from the University of British Columbia in Vancouver.*

#### *Federal Resources for Rural Veterans*

*Moderator: Joe Belden, Deputy Executive Director, Housing Assistance Council*  
*Previously Director of the Technical Assistance and Training Division and a Research Associate at HAC, he has also worked for the U.S. Department of Agriculture, on Capitol Hill, and for several policy-oriented research organizations in Washington, D.C. He co-edited Housing in Rural America (Sage 1998). He received his JD from Baylor University Law School and his BA in history and political science from the University of Texas at Austin. He also served three years on active duty in the U.S. Army.*

*Ms. Gina Capra, Director, Veterans Administration, Office of Rural Health*  
*Promotes increased access to quality health care services for Veterans in rural and highly rural locations. She manages an annual budget of \$250 million for funding awards to partnering 21 Veterans Integrated Service Networks (VISNs), 152 Medical Centers and national program offices to explore innovative projects intended to reduce barriers to care for rural Veterans and their providers via the use of technology, targeted training and evaluation methods. The Office of Rural Health Veterans Rural Health Resource Centers (VRHRC), based in Florida, Iowa and Utah, provide technical assistance and expertise in specialized rural issues. A national cadre of Rural Consultants (VRCs) located in each VISN provide regional coordination and rural project support. Office of Rural Health serves as the lead Veterans Health Administration (VHA) coordinator for collaboration with the Indian Health Service (IHS), serving Native American/Alaska Native Veterans in their tribal and/or rural communities.*

### Today's Presentation

- *Background: Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) and the Veterans Health Administration (VHA)*
- *Rural Veterans Demographics and Needs*
- *Veterans Homelessness*
- *Department Priority and Collaborative Efforts*

### Mission of the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA)

*"...to care for him who shall have borne the battle and for his widow and orphan..."*  
*-Abraham Lincoln, 1865*

### What is the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA)?

- *Established in 1930*
- *Elevated to Cabinet level in 1989*
- *Federal government's 2<sup>nd</sup> largest department after the Department of Defense*
- *Three components:*
  - *Veterans Health Administration (VHA)*
  - *Veterans Benefits Administration (VBA)*
  - *National Cemetery Administration (NCA)*

### Veterans Health Administration "Footprint"

*152 Medical Centers*  
*985 Outpatient Clinics (Hospitals, Community, Independent and Mobile)*  
*133 Community Living Centers*  
*300 Readjustment Counseling Centers Vet Centers*  
*103 Domiciliary Resident Rehabilitation Treatment Programs*

### Eligibility for VHA Healthcare

- *Eligibility for VHA health care services depends on a number of qualifying factors, including:*
  - *The nature of a Veteran's discharge from military service (e.g., honorable, other than honorable, dishonorable)*
  - *Length of service*
  - *VA adjudicated disabilities (commonly referred to as "service-connected disabilities")*
  - *Income level*
  - *Available VA resources*

### VHA Eligibility Priority Groups

*Veterans eligibility for VA healthcare is based on category group (“Priority Enrollment Group”)*

- *Priority Group 1  
Veterans with service-connected disabilities rated 50% or more disabling*
- *Priority Group 2  
Veterans with service-connected disabilities rated 30% or 40% disabling*
- *Priority Group 3  
POWs, Purple Heart recipients, those rated 10% or 20% disabled, or those eligible under Title 38, U.S.C., Section 1151*
- *Priority Group 4  
Veterans who receive aid and attendance or housebound benefits or are catastrophically*
- *Priority Group 5  
Veterans whose income and net worth are below established VA thresholds of \$31K - \$4 (depending on family size), those on VA pension and/or are eligible for Medicaid benefit*
- *Priority Group 6  
WWI, Mexican Border War Veterans, disorders associated with exposure to herbicides while serving in Vietnam, exposure to ionizing radiation in Hiroshima and Nagasaki, Gulf*
- *Priority Group 7  
Veterans who pay co-payments with income and/or net worth above the VA threshold*
- *Priority Group 8  
Veterans who agree to pay specified co-payments with income and/or net worth above the and HUD geographic index who were enrolled before January 2003. Income requirement from year to year.*

### Rural Population Served

- *Of 8.9 million enrolled Veterans, 3.2 million enrolled Veterans live in rural/highly rural areas*
  - *22 million Veterans nationwide, 6.1 million Veterans living in rural areas*
  - *36% of total enrolled Veteran population live in rural/highly rural areas*
  - *Approximately one-third (31%) of Operation Enduring Freedom and Operation Iraqi Freedom (OEF/OIF) users of the VA Health Care System in FY12 reside in rural or highly rural areas*
- *25 VA medical centers are designated as rural or highly rural facilities*
  - *340 VA community based outpatient clinics are considered rural or highly rural*
  - *All VHA Regions (known as Veterans Integrated Service Networks) have a Network Homeless Coordinator who leads homeless program efforts*

### **Rural Veterans' Most Common Outpatient Diagnoses**

- **High Blood Pressure**
- **Posttraumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD)**
- **Type II Diabetes**
- **Depressive Disorder**
- **High Cholesterol/Blood Pressure**
- **At least 1 service-connected disability**
- **For Rural Homeless Veterans:**
  - **Severe mental illness**
  - **Intensive case management**
  - **Substance Use/Behavioral Health**

### **The Rural Challenge:**

**How are rural communities (and Rural Veterans) unique?**

- **Status/Health Equity**
  - **Older, sicker, and poorer population**
  - **Few homeless shelters, limited hours**
- **Limited options for integrated health care and services coordination**
  - **Primary and Specialty Care**
  - **Oral/Dental and Vision services**
  - **Behavioral Health Care**
  - **Mental Health, Substance Use, Case Management**
  - **Healthcare Workforce**
  - **Limited affordable housing, child care, legal assistance, credit counseling**
- **Geography/Transportation**
  - **Longer travel distances to receive care and stretched services**
  - **Lack of public transportation**
- **Limited internet/broadband connectivity**

### **VHA Office of Rural Health (ORH)**

- **The VHA Office of Rural Health (ORH) was created by Congress in 2007 under Public Law 109-461, Sec 212**
- **Mission: Improve access and quality of care for enrolled rural and highly rural Veterans**
- **Works across VA and with external partners to develop policies, best practices and lessons learned to improve care and services for rural and highly rural Veterans.**

**ORH Investments:**

***Project Focus Areas – FY 2014***

<b><i>Category</i></b>	<b><i># of ORH Projects</i></b>
<b><i>Rural Telehealth, including Home Telemonitoring, Store and Forward Image Transmission, and Clinic Based Video Telemedicine</i></b>	<b><i>24</i></b>
<b><i>Rural Primary Care/Patient Aligned Care Teams (PCMH)</i></b>	<b><i>16</i></b>
<b><i>Rural Specialty Care: Cardiology, Audiology, Prosthetics, Optometry, Radiology, Dermatology</i></b>	<b><i>112</i></b>
<b><i>Rural Community Based Outpatient Clinics, Outreach Clinics, Mobile Clinics</i></b>	<b><i>68</i></b>
<b><i>Rural Education Initiatives</i></b>	<b><i>37</i></b>
<b><i>Rural Facilities Improvement</i></b>	<b><i>26</i></b>
<b><i>Rural Home Based Primary Care</i></b>	<b><i>28</i></b>
<b><i>Rural Homelessness</i></b>	<b><i>6</i></b>
<b><i>Rural Mental Health, including Post Traumatic Stress Disorder</i></b>	<b><i>28</i></b>
<b><i>Other Categories</i></b>	<b><i>46</i></b>
<b><i>Rural Outreach Activities</i></b>	<b><i>22</i></b>
<b><i>Projects Focused on Rural Special Populations, including Women American Indians/Alaska Natives, and Asian American/Pacific Islanders</i></b>	<b><i>20</i></b>
<b><i>Rural Veteran Transportation Programs, including ground and air Transportation</i></b>	<b><i>14</i></b>
<b><i>TOTAL</i></b>	<b><i>447</i></b>

**Department of Veterans Affairs**

**Priority: Ending Veteran Homelessness**

- **VA's Plan to End Veteran Homelessness**
  - ***The Department of Veterans Affairs Secretary Eric Shinseki requested a strategic plan to end Veteran Homelessness by 2015***
  - ***The Plan calls for coordinated, collaborative efforts with community and federal partners, including”***
    - Government agencies (through the United States Interagency Council on Homelessness)***
    - Community agencies***
    - Faith-based and community groups***
    - Other partners such as business leaders***
- **Components of VA's Plan to End Veteran Homelessness**
  - 1. Provide Affordable***
  - 2. Provide Permanent Supportive Housing***

3. *Increase Meaningful and Sustainable Employment*
4. *Reduce Financial Vulnerability*
5. *Transform the Homeless Crisis Response System*
6. *Prevention*

### Housing First

- *Housing First – an evidence based, cost effective approach to ending homelessness for the most vulnerable and chronically homeless individuals*
- *Adopted in VA: quickly providing homeless Veterans with permanent housing through the HUD-VASH and/or Supportive Services for Veteran Families (SSVF) programs and with needed services provided*
- *Housing First pilot project in 14 selected HUD-VASH programs*
  - *Preliminary results are positive*
  - *VA Community of Practice established to promote learning via the VA National Center of Homelessness Among Veterans.*

### HUD-VASH: A Collaborative Program

- *HUD Provides:*
  - *Section 8 Vouchers*
  - *Operating requirements for those vouchers/waivers*
- *VA Provides:*
  - *Entry point for HUD-VASH, confirming:*
    - *Eligibility requirements met*
    - *Meets chronically homeless definition*
    - *Highly vulnerable and has significant need*
  - *Case management and supportive services*
- *Eligibility Criteria:*
  - *Veteran is eligible for VA health care*
  - *Homeless (per the McKinney-Vento and HEARTH Act definition)*
  - *Agrees to participate in the care management services*
  - *Income levels in HUD/Public Housing Authority's (PHA) limits*
  - *Is not on a state requirement for lifetime sex-offender registration*

### Homelessness amongst Veterans – 2013

- *On a single night in January 2013, there were 57,849 homeless Veterans in the country = 12% of all homeless adults*
- *60% of homeless veterans were in emergency shelters, transitional housing programs, or safe havens*
- *40% were in unsheltered locations.*
- *Just under 8% of homeless Veterans were female*

- *Three states – California, Florida, and New York – accounted for 44% of all homeless Veterans across the country*

**Department of Veteran Affairs**  
**Priority: Ending Veteran Homelessness**

- *Veteran homelessness decreased by 17,760 or 24% since 2009.*

*Point in Time Estimates of Homeless Veterans*

<u>YEAR</u>	<u>ESTIMATE</u>
2009	75,609
2010	76,329
2011	67,495
2012	62,619
2013	57,849

*For additional information, please contact:*

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***Mr. Tony Hernandez, Administrator, USDA Rural Housing Service***  
***Mr. Keith Kelly, Asst. Secretary, Veterans' Employment & Training Service, US DOL***  
***Ms. Ann Oliva, Director, HUD Office of Special Needs Assistance Programs***

***Models of Programs for Rural Veterans***

***Moderator: Mr. Mark Walker, The American Legion***  
***Ms. Heather Pritchard, The Home Depot Foundation***  
***Ms. Retha Patton, Easter Eight CDC***  
***Ms. Rita Markley, Committee on Temporary Shelter***  
***Mr. Kenn Sassorossi, Housing Vermont***

*Want to thank the State of North Dakota for allowing myself to attend this conference.*

*Senator Richard Marcellais*

*Handouts: Housing Assistance Council  
The American Legion Still Serving America  
Project Details: Patriot Place  
Canal Street Apartments  
Canal Street Veterans Housing  
Rural Voices  
From Service to Shelter  
Housing Seniors & Veterans in Rural America  
2014 National Rural Housing Conference 12/3-5/14*

*Handouts are available upon request.*

